

Testimony, Appropriations Committee 02.10.10
Re: Retain funding for CommPact Initiative

Good evening members of Appropriations. Thank you for the opportunity to address you this evening in support of continued funding for the CommPact Schools initiative.

Waterbury is the proud and supportive host to 2 CommPact schools, Washington Elementary School and West Side Middle School. The Waterbury Board of Education enthusiastically endorsed district participation in CommPact and commends the efforts of the principals and their staff in applying for and now embarking on a whole school reform effort called CommPact.

It took a Herculean effort, in a very difficult and challenged district, for these 2 principals to pull together and get buy in from the required partners that make CommPact. Buy in from staff, unions, parents, district leaders, community leaders and business partners. In all cases, a commitment was required to CommPact, a 5-year commitment to give the initiative time to percolate and gel, so it could result in success for students. Principals achieved those commitments, as well as committing themselves. CommPact requires school staff to undergo an agonizing, honest self appraisal of where they are, why they are there, where they want to be, and what they need to do, to give up, to change in order to get there.

And here we are, CommPact is 1 ½ years young, has already endured a reduction in funding right out of the starting gate. And all stakeholders rose to the challenge, keeping the initiative alive, active, and moving forward, with only half of the funding originally promised by the state. Uconn has done a phenomenal job seeking and acquiring private funding, seeking out donations of time as well as money. Our principals have put forward tremendous effort to maximize not only funding, but in-kind resources in an effort to keep the CommPact initiative going. And in the face of another cut to funds, vow to find a way to keep going with even less. CommPact stakeholders have not given up their 5-year commitment. It would appear that the state, and Gov Rell, has given up.

What does all this mean for CommPact? It means that the success of one CommPact school making Safe Harbor status will happen again-but it will be a much more difficult effort and will happen later rather than sooner. It means substantial gains in reading scores at West Side Middle School will be repeated at other CommPact Schools-but it will be a tougher climb that happens later rather than sooner. And CT students cannot afford later rather than sooner. CT students deserve sooner, not later.

CommPact is an initiative that has what it takes to move education in CT forward and post steady and current gains. Never put off till tomorrow what you can do today. And today you can fund CommPact and give students in CT a leg up to success.

Ann Sweeney
Commissioner, Waterbury Board of Education